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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000032

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SUBJECT: FAULT LINES IN SOUTHERN SHIA PARTIES

REF: A) 05 BAGHDAD 4329, B) BASRAH 13, C) 05 BASRAH 140, D) BASRAH 27, E) BASRAH 29, F) 05 BASRAH 77, G) 05 BASRAH 68, H) BASRAH 19

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BASRAH, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: In Basrah, the Shia parties of the Unified Iraqi Coalition (UIC) of List 555 show signs of splitting, with the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) lining up against the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution (SCIRI) and Badr Organization. Fadillah and Da'awa parties exhibit signs of waning influence. The Fadillah party and OMS usually act in concert in the south, and Da'awa party is losing its voters to SCIRI and Badr. SCIRI and Badr's electoral population is aging, while OMS appeals to the growing population of unemployed and disaffected youth. End Summary.

Unified Iraqi Coalition Not Unified

12. (C) In Basrah, the main political parties that made up the UIC- List 555 show signs of splitting, with OMS lining up against SCIRI and Badr. Able to campaign effectively as a unified political list in the December 15, 2005 elections, 555 parties secured an overwhelming victory in all four of the southernmost Iraqi provinces. However, with its mission of winning a National Assembly majority accomplished, the Coalition no longer presents a unified front to Basrah residents.

13. (C) The most significant rift in the Shia parties is between OMS and SCIRI/Badr. In all four of the southernmost provinces, Jayish al Mahdi (JAM), the militant branch of OMS, and Badr Corps, the military wing of SCIRI, vie for control on the streets. Before the December 15 elections, the REO received regular reports of JAM and Badr skirmishes in Maysan and Basrah provinces; fighting among all militias has intensified since the December 15 election. In the post-electoral period, JAM has made headway into the SCIRI stronghold of Muthanna province, which previously had the reputation of being one of the most peaceful provinces in Iraq. Similar turf wars are now taking place in Dhi Qar province.

Lines between Fadillah and OMS Blurred

14. (C) In the post-December 15 election period, Fadillah party leadership in Basrah has colluded more with OMS and JAM. An REO journalist contact even reported that, "JAM and Fadillah are the same party. They work together, support each other." He said that at Basrah Provincial Council meetings, only about half of the forty-one members attend meetings, and those who attend are of the OMS/Fadillah block, along with a few independents.

15. (C) The Basrah Fadillah party appears to diverge from the Baghdad Fadillah party. The BPC and the Basrah Governor have called for boycotting relations with Coalition forces three times in the past six months, and as much as the Governor has tried to pass the boycott off as a creation of the BPC, it is clear that he has stood behind the suspension of communications with the Coalition each time (reftels A, B). Where the Baghdad Fadillah party espouses open relations with the Coalition and other political parties, such as the secular Iraqi National Accord (INA), the Basrah Fadillah party has made no appreciable efforts to engage non-Shia, non-555 parties. Following the growing trend of "Islamification" in Basrah (reftel C), Fadillah party members in Basrah have aligned themselves more and more closely with the conservative party line of the 555 List parties. It is now difficult to discern any significant differences in the actions and stances of Fadillah party leaders and those of OMS in Basrah.

16. (C) The Fadillah party, although technically the front-running political party in Basrah, has more closely aligned its party platform to that of OMS. The events of the past two months in Basrah have demonstrated the ineffectuality of the current local government, while OMS has upped its public image as that of a security provider. Basrah Governor Mohammed Waeli of the Fadillah party is an unpopular figure and continues to lose support. Since the December 15 elections, he has sought to distance himself from the BPC, led by Chairman Muhammed Sa'adoon al-Abaadi (Da'awa). During the days of chaos that followed the Samarra mosque destruction, JAM militia patrolled the streets of Basrah while the Iraqi police were mostly absent (reftel D). During the February 25 visit of Moqtada al Sadr to Basrah, Governor Waeli appeared on television standing directly behind Moqtada (reftel E).

17. (C) The prevalence of OMS members at Fadillah party

meetings in Basrah further blurs the lines between the two

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parties. The current BPC coordinator for OMS in Basrah, Aqeel Kadhim described himself as a Fadillah party member with OMS links (refTel F). OMS leader Sheikh Asaad Al Basri said that OMS received enough support from the Fadillah party that it did not need to run its own candidates in the last provincial elections in Basrah (refTel G).

Da'awa Weakening, Losing Voters to Badr, SCIRI

18. (C) A National Democratic Institute (NDI) contact described the Da'awa Party in Basrah as a "wrinkled, wizened raisin of a political party." Unable to adapt and change its political message to appeal to younger voters, Da'awa is losing votes to the stronger Badr Organization. BPC Chairman Abaadi has angered many BPC members by his increasing authoritarianism, requiring each BPC decision to be signed by him. Chairman Abaadi's decision to suspend communications with the British and Danish (refTel H) has further isolated him from other council members.

Electoral fault Lines: Age and Federalism

19. (C) Da'awa, SCIRI, and Badr all draw from the same electorate in the south: Iraqis in the 35-60 age range who suffered greatly under the Saddam regime, many of whom have close ties to Iran, and who support federalism as a way to ensure that the south retains control over its own resources. Leaders of these political parties tend to be war heroes from the resistance to Saddam, sport battle wounds, and are well known as having been imprisoned or had family members killed or imprisoned by Saddam. As Da'awa loses support from its electorate, voters turn toward SCIRI and Badr, parties that uphold the same principles of protecting the rights of Shia Muslims through federalism. However, this electoral population is aging. The political messages of SCIRI, Badr, and Da'awa do little to address the economic concerns of younger Iraqis.

110. (C) In contrast, OMS appeals to the younger Iraqi age group of 18-30 that faces economic uncertainty and high unemployment and that did not develop the strong ties to Iran that the previous generation of Shia in the south did. This population distrusts the idea of federalism. Wary of SCIRI and Badr because of these parties' links to the Iranian government, this electorate is susceptible to Moqtada al-Sadr's national unity message, as well as anti-Coalition sentiment.

Electorate Favors OMS

111. (C) Comment: The most significant rift in the Shia parties in the southernmost provinces is between OMS and SCIRI/Badr. The Fadillah party in the south has demonstrated that it is unwilling to take a position that opposes OMS. On the other side, Da'awa is losing voters to SCIRI and Badr. The polarization of the political playing field between SCIRI-Badr and OMS has intensified in Basrah since the December 15 election, and the electoral division favors OMS over the long term. The younger population shows increasing support for the OMS party because of its messages on economic conditions, independence from outside influence, and distrust of federalism. The older generation supports the SCIRI/Badr parties, with their emphasis on securing control over resources and independence from the Baghdad government. Unless SCIRI and Badr are able to adapt their political message to appeal to younger voters, they risk losing ground in the upcoming provincial elections. End Comment.
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